

# SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY AND GUIDANCE

## Weaverham High School



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## **CHESHIRE WEST AND CHESTER COUNCIL**

### **SCHOOLS HR CONSULTANCY**

#### **MODEL SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY AND GUIDANCE FOR SCHOOLS**

##### **1. Introduction**

This policy sets out our organisations expectations on the workforce's use of social media and reminds staff of the standards of behaviour expected of them when they are posting on social media, as well as the consequences of falling below those standards.

Social media is defined as any interactive media technology that facilitates the creation of sharing of information, ideas, interests, and other forms of expression through virtual communities and networks.

Weaverham High School understands that many, if not all, employees will have a social media presence; and trusts that staff will use this responsibly and not in a way that could cause a detriment to the school, its staff, pupils, parents, governors, and the local community.

The aim of this Policy and Guidance document is to set out the expectations of the school with regard to the use of social media by employees, both in an official capacity (i.e., publishing on social media on behalf of the school) and in private postings. The policy and guidelines therefore aim to provide employees with information to make responsible decisions whilst making the most of the technology.

This policy applies to all employees at Weaverham High School. The policy also applies to any workers e.g. agency workers, casual workers, volunteers or other third parties who are associated with the School and who may / may not have access to electronic communications.

For the purpose of this Policy and Guidance document, the term "social media" refers to any interactive media technology that facilitates the creation of sharing of information, ideas, interests, and other forms of expression through virtual communities and networks.

"Social media" can be referenced in a variety of ways, often depending on which sector is discussing it. Other terms which may be used in a similar context include "social software", "social computing" and "Web 2.0". For convenience the term "social media" is used throughout this document.

Well known examples include Facebook, Twitter, SnapChat, TikTok, WhatsApp, LinkedIn, and Instagram as well as blog sites, on-line encyclopaedias such as Wikipedia; and video / image sharing websites such as YouTube and Flickr. However, employees should be aware that this list is not exhaustive, there are many more examples of social media than can be

listed here and this is a constantly changing area. Employees should follow this guidance in relation to any social media that they use.

## **2. Policy**

### **2.1 Business Use**

Weaverham High School encourages employees to make reasonable and appropriate use of social media websites as part of their work. It is an important part of how the school promotes its services.

School will, if appropriate, appoint an employee (or number of employees) to the specific task of updating social media sites on behalf of school e.g., with updates on school events, or information for parents. Any employee wishing to post information on social media on the school's behalf should either refer the task to an appropriately delegated individual or seek guidance / approval from the appropriate person before doing so.

Employees must be aware at all times that, if contributing to the school's social media activities, they are representing the school. Staff who use social media as part of their job must adhere to the principles as set out in the Guidelines, below.

### **2.2 Personal Use**

Weaverham High School recognises that many employees make use of social media in a personal capacity. Employees must be aware that inappropriate activity on social media can be potentially damaging to the school if they are recognised as being a school employee.

Any communications that employees make in a personal capacity through social media must therefore adhere to the principles as set out in the Guidelines, below.

Employees are reminded to ensure their personal privacy settings are appropriate e.g., that your postings are only visible to those people who you have designated as "friends". Please refer to the social media provider's guidance on how to do this, as it will differ across applications.

Even when privacy settings are set appropriately, employees are advised that 'private chat' group forums or a 'one to one' message via WhatsApp groups for example, are only private whilst the integrity of that group is maintained. Employees should always be aware that if anyone is offended by what they have written, this can be reported and any link with school, deliberate or not, could constitute misconduct or even gross misconduct. Please see section 5 below for examples of serious breaches.

If school employees decide to utilise social media platforms as a method of communicating with colleagues which may include work related issues, group members should be aware that this policy applies in full.

Whilst in work, school employees are allowed limited access to social media websites for personal use from the school's computers/devices or using their own equipment, in their own time and in accordance with the ICT Acceptable Use Policy.

## **3 Monitoring**

Weaverham High School reserves the right to monitor employees' internet usage on school IT equipment and will endeavour to inform an affected employee when this is to happen and the reasons for it. Valid reasons for checking an employee's internet usage include suspicions that the employee has:

- Been using social media websites when he/she should be working; or
- Acted in a way that is in breach of the rules set out in this Policy and Guidance document.

The organisation reserves the right to retain information that it has gathered on employees' use of the internet for a period of one year.

Certain sites or content may be blocked by the school as they are deemed inappropriate for a school setting.

Access to particular social media websites may be withdrawn in any case of misuse.

#### **4 Use of Social Media in Recruitment**

The Keeping Children Safe in Education document states *'In addition, as part of the shortlisting process schools and colleges should consider carrying out an online search as part of their due diligence on the shortlisted candidates. This may help identify any incidents or issues that have happened, and are publicly available online, which the school or college might want to explore with the applicant at interview.'*

Our advice on the matter is as follows: -

- Only Shortlisted candidates should be 'vetted' not all applicants.
- We advise that the person carrying out the vetting, should be a separate person from those sitting on an interview panel.
- Online Vetting consists of a general search of a persons' name via a recognised search engine, it does not equate to a 'deep dive' of their secured social media accounts and profiles, it is information available in the public domain.
- The purpose of the online search is therefore only to check the applicant's suitability to work with children and not to make a judgement on other areas of their life.
- Any information retrieved that may mean an individual could be deemed unsuitable to work with children should be discussed with your Senior HR Advisor in the first instance and specific advice provided before the recruitment process continues.
- If the recruitment process is to continue, the information should be passed to the interviewing panel for consideration and discussion with the candidate and further advice and guidance may be sought from HR based on their responses.

As this is a regulatory requirement, you do not need consent, but the applicant has a right to know beforehand that this search will be conducted if they are shortlisted

[Keeping children safe in education 2022 \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/72321/keeping-children-safe-in-education-2022.pdf)

## **5 Breach of the Policy**

All employees are required to adhere to this policy and should note that any breaches of this policy may lead to action under the school's Disciplinary Procedure. Employees should be aware that their external activities, which may come to light through social media, may impact on their role in the school. This is especially true if it is clear from a person's profile that they work at Weaverham High School; however even if the school is not named as the employer, comments can still be deemed to reflect on the school as it is assumed that many people reading those comments / seeing images etc will be aware of the employee's connection to the school.

Serious breaches of this policy may constitute gross misconduct and lead to summary dismissal. Examples of serious breaches include:

- Incidents of bullying of colleagues
- Breaches of confidentiality and data in line with GDPR
- Breaches of privacy of children at the school
- Offensive language / threats to parents, staff, governors, or members of the public
- Posting images that are inappropriate or links to inappropriate content. Inappropriate can include any conduct or content that is unwarranted and could reasonably be interpreted to be demeaning or offensive by an individual or the school. Making defamatory comments about individuals, organisations or groups
- Any other social media activity which could be seen as causing serious damage to the school's reputation

This list is neither exclusive nor exhaustive.

Employees can, to an extent, prevent misunderstandings by ensuring that their privacy settings only allow content to be accessed by "friends"; however, employees should always be aware that if anyone is offended by what they have posted, this can be reported and any link with school, deliberate or not, could constitute misconduct or even gross misconduct.

## **6. Staff Mentions in Social Media**

Weaverham High School has a duty to take reasonable care in relation to the health and safety of its employees and the basic steps set out in this guidance should apply in all cases where an employee is subject to abuse via social media.

Weaverham High School reserves the right to monitor social media for inappropriate activity referencing the school, and also for mentions of staff. Where "staff mentions" are picked up, either through monitoring or by another employee / parent / governor etc, it should be reported to the [Headteacher / Business Manager / other appropriate person] as soon as possible so that it can be raised with the member of staff affected and appropriate support offered.

The range of responses may include one or more of the following and should be considered on a case by case basis;

- Contacting the police where the posting is threatening
- Contacting the hosting service to request the removal of a posting
- Legal action where postings are particularly abusive and sustained over a period of time

The member of staff affected must be kept informed about what action is being taken and why some types of action are not being pursued. It is important to show that all the issues have been considered and responded to appropriately.

### See also

- ICT Acceptable Use Policy
- Dignity at Work Policy
- Code of Conduct
- Data Protection Policy
- Teachers Standards

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<b>2.0</b>	<b>April 2023</b>	<b>Schools HR</b>		<b>September 2024</b>

## Appendix 1 – Guidance for Staff

### **Remember!** **Be Professional; Be Responsible; Be Credible**

Participating online results in your comments being permanently available and open to being republished in other media

IF YOU DO ONE THING AS A RESULT OF READING THESE GUIDELINES: Amend your privacy settings on each social media application you use, so that your information, updates, profile and photographs can only be accessed by those people you choose.

#### **1.0 *Remain professional***

- **Do not** bring the School, its pupils, parents, staff, governors, or local community into disrepute by posting negative comments about them - remain professional at all times
- **Do** limit access to Social Media sites, for personal use during work time, to your own time
- **Do act in accordance with the Code of Conduct and your professional standards of conduct; any breach of the Code(s) or the Social Media Policy and Guidelines could result in disciplinary action.**
- **If you wouldn't say it in public – don't say it on-line**

#### **2.0 *Act within the Law***

- **Do** stay within the law
- **Do not** do anything that could be considered discriminatory or bullying

#### **3.0 *Keep Confidentiality in mind***

- **Do not** disclose anything confidential or sensitive about the school or another third party associated with the school
- **Do not use social media to raise issues e.g. grievances, whistleblowing or concerns about children's safety or wellbeing.** Familiarise yourself with the School's Whistleblowing Protocol, grievance procedure and safeguarding Procedure and use these, as necessary.

#### **4.0 *Avoid conflicts of interest***

- **Do** include a disclaimer statement, making it clear that views expressed are those of yourself personally and not of the School, if engaging in any discussion about the School
- **Do not** make commitments or engage in activities on behalf of the school unless authorised to do so
- **Do not** use the school's name and/or logo or a school email address in personal profiles e.g. your online name, or when purchasing personal items
- **Do** avoid any conflicts of interests with third parties, such as other schools, suppliers or service users
- It is not advisable to invite parents to become your friends in social networking sites for business purposes. There may be a conflict of interest and security and privacy issues.

#### **5.0 *Specific guidance for Bloggers/Vloggers***

- If you want to start blogging/vlogging, or already have a personal blog/vlog website which indicates in any way that you work at Weaverham High School you should tell your manager / Headteacher and obtain their permission to refer to the school.

- If your blog/vlog makes it clear that you work for Weaverham High School, it should include a simple and visible disclaimer such as “The views expressed here are my own and don't necessarily represent the views of the Weaverham High School.”
- Don't reveal confidential information. This might include aspects of school policy or details of internal discussions. Again, consult your Headteacher/manager if you are unclear about what might be confidential.
- You should not use your blogs/vlogs to attack or abuse colleagues. You should respect the privacy and the feelings of others. Remember that if you break the law on your blog/vlog (for example by posting something defamatory), you will be personally responsible.
- If someone offers to pay you for blogging/vlogging this could constitute a conflict of interest and you must consult your Headteacher/manager.
- If someone from the media or press contacts you about posts on your blog/vlog that relate to Weaverham High School you should talk to your Headteacher/manager before responding. [Community / Aided Schools only - The relevant CW&C press office must be consulted if appropriate].

## **6.0 Specific guidance for Social Networks, Discussions forums, wikis etc**

- Use the privacy settings available.
- Ask permission before posting someone's picture in a social network or a conversation that was meant to be private.
- Don't be afraid to be yourself, but do so respectfully. See Section 5, above, for examples of breaches which may be serious enough to constitute misconduct or gross misconduct.
- **Under no circumstance should offensive comments be made about Weaverham High School colleagues (or other connected parties e.g. pupils, parents, governors) on the internet or any form of social media. This may amount to cyber-bullying and could be deemed a disciplinary offence.**
- Remember that there are always consequences to what you publish. If you're about to publish something that makes you even the slightest bit uncomfortable, think carefully before proceeding.
- Ensure that your entries, articles or comments are neutral in tone, factual and verifiable. In addition, there are usually guidelines in sites such as Wikipedia on adding links. Read the guidelines carefully before submitting or editing an article.
- If staff members edit online encyclopaedias at work the source of the correction will be recorded as a school IP address. The intervention may therefore look as if it comes from Weaverham High School itself. Weaverham High School employees should therefore act in a manner that does not bring the school into disrepute and should not post derogatory or offensive comments on any online encyclopaedias.
- Never remove criticism of, or inappropriate content relating to Weaverham High School. Report it to the Headteacher for them to take appropriate action.

## **7.0 Specific guidance on video and media sharing**

- Ensure that all video and media (including presentations) are safe to share and do not contain any confidential or derogatory information.
- If the content is official Weaverham High School content then it must be labelled and tagged as such and must not be affiliated with an individual.
- When posting video / photographs etc as an individual, work must be labelled and tagged as such and where appropriate a disclaimer used. No posting should identify school unless it is an official posting on behalf of the school, as agreed with the Headteacher.